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Researchers from the Naval Medical Research Center Participate in Brain Awareness Week Event

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Deputy Director of Naval Medical Research Center's (NMRC) Operational and Undersea Medicine Directorate (OUMD) Lt. Cmdr. Peter Walker (center) monitors students as they try on a flak jacket during a demonstration at the National Museum of Health and Medicine's Brain Injury Week event. (Photo courtesy of Naval Medical Research Center Public Affairs)

Story courtesy of Naval Medical Research Center Public Affairs

Researchers from the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC) participated in the DoD National Museum of Health and Medicine's (NMHM) 17th Annual Brain Awareness Week event, March 17.

Brain Awareness Week is one of the museum's central efforts to support DoD STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) workforce development priorities. The program is closely aligned with performance expectations for middle-school students as described in the Next Generation Science Standards set by the National Academy of Science.

Deputy Director of NMRC's Operational and Undersea Medicine Directorate (OUMD), Lt. Cmdr. Peter Walker and researcher, Lt. Melissa Mehalick, participated in the event highlighting some of OUMD's work related to blast injuries and monitoring brain activity. NMRC was one of several DOD activities participating in the event.

Walker and Mehalick also took turns helping students try on flak jackets, a form of body armor designed to provide protection from case fragments from high explosive weaponry, Kevlar helmets with blast sensors, and even demonstrated the feeling of a blast using balloons.

"As both Naval officers and neuroscientists, it is very rewarding for us to contribute to the development of students' interest in STEM fields in order to help develop the next generation of scientists," said Walker. "Many students enjoyed the simulated experience of theatre by wearing military combat helmets and vests equipped with pressure sensors."



Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC) researcher Lt. Melissa Mehalick (center) helps a student try on a flak jacket during a demonstration at the National Museum of Health and Medicine's Brain Injury Week event. (Photo courtesy of Naval Medical Research Center Public Affairs)

The event included several hands-on station activities to learn about brain functions, brain disorders and influences on the brain. Middle school students from numerous local schools in Maryland and Washington D.C. rotated through interactive learning stations. Over 120 students participated in the event.

“Brain Awareness Week exists to inspire an interest in brain sciences in the minds of our young visitors, so that we may someday see them develop into a new generation of neuroscientists,” said Andre Schierkolk, NMHM public program manager. “Partnering with some of the most cutting-edge brain science research organizations in the country, Brain Awareness Week at NMHM highlights research and advances from those individual agencies and promotes this field as a career options.”

NMHM is home to one of the world's most comprehensive neuroanatomical collections and features a major exhibit on traumatic brain injuries. The exhibit showcased actual human brain specimens that demonstrate a variety of brain injuries including hemorrhage, blunt force trauma and bullet wounds.

The mission of OUMD is to conduct medical research, development, testing and evaluation to develop new information and technologies to enhance the health, safety, performance, and deployment readiness of Navy and Marine Corps personnel. The OUMD Directorate consists of three departments: NeuroTrauma, Undersea Medicine, and Regenerative Medicine.

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